Into Winter

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Into Winter

by neunundneunzig

Summary

Two months ago, Will was working a particularly disturbing case. He ended up dissociating and having sex with a stranger. Now, he's working the missing girls' case, and the psychologist Jack brought on looks far too familiar.

Not necessary to read the first work in the series, but I would suggest it.

Notes

Work will be less canon aligned after this chapter. Tags and rating may also change as work progresses.

October

Doctor Hannibal Lecter. Will rolled the name around in his mind. He knew it, but he just couldn't figure out quite how. Jack Crawford had told him they were bringing him in to help on the missing girls case. Jack mentioned he had been a mentor to Dr. Bloom but that didn't seem quite right. He sat, looking over the information, tired. He couldn't see their killer's face, not yet.

Jack had pulled him back in after a blessed hiatus to work on the case. He could usually slip into the skins of the killers quickly, even if there was a little hesitation. He didn't understand this man yet. He loved the girls. Not sexually, but he loved them deeply. Will sighed, staring at the photos, as if they'd suddenly show him something new.

His thoughts drifted again, to his great annoyance. Nothing Jack said to him struck a chord. He couldn't figure out why that name was so familiar. He sat up a little, hearing the man's booming voice coming down the hallway. He looked back down at the papers as two men entered the room.

"Will, this is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. He's here to help work on the profile." Jack said. Will heard something in his voice that sounded half like a lie.

Will didn't stand to greet him, just twisting his head, "Hello, Dr. Lecter, hopefully you can-"

He looked down and swallowed, going quiet. Ah. That would be it.

Two months ago he was working on a case involving a man who had sex with his killers before mutilating them, inspired by some obscene piece of French erotica. He found himself dissociating, and ended up hooking up with some old rich man. Will had tried his damndest to forget about it and shove it behind him, mostly out of shame. He thought he'd done a good job of moving past it.

But his one time flame stood there now, smiling politely at Will, waiting for him to continue despite the long silence. Will weighed his options quickly. Dr. Lecter didn't seem the kind to bother him about it. Will wasn't honestly going to drop the case or refuse to work with this man due to one night of vulnerability months ago.

"Hopefully," He said, voice a little shakier, still not looking up, "You can give us some help. I can't see our killer's face yet."

"I will give it a keen eye." Hannibal smiled, then turned back to Jack, looking over the evidence.

Will wanted to gag at his choice of words. It was like Hannibal knew about the case they met during. He likely did, if he read that damned website. Will tried not to anger himself at the thought of it. It had smeared him, and the name of ethics in journalism enough. And that was at least the second article written on Will, both using terms the DSM would detest. He shoved the anger down, knowing it would do him no good.

Was his killer angry? No. No part of him did this in anger. Then why did he hurt them? Will wanted to dig deeper into this case. Not wanted. Needed. And more so he needed to not focus on Hannibal.

And then they were both sitting down, Hannibal asking about confessions.

“Twelve dozen, the last time I checked. None of them had any details until this morning.” Jack tensed in frustration, “And then they all had details. Some genius in Duluth PD took a photograph of Elise Nichols’ body with his cell phone, shared it with his friends, and then Freddy Lounds posted it on Tattlecrime.”

“Tasteless.” Will hissed, anger bubbling right back up.

“I’m sure you have fine taste.” Hannibal noted. Will tried not to sling his emotions at Hannibal. A man wearing suits like that one to talk about taste. A man who would hook up with an emotionally unstable freak like Will to talk about taste.

“My thoughts and actions are often not... tasty.” Will gritted his teeth, eyeing Hannibal’s patent leather shoes. It was somewhere safe to look for now. He didn’t have to think about how he could have killed Hannibal.

“Nor mine.” Hannibal noted, “No effective barriers.”

“I build forts.” Will scowled. He needed this man to know that he wasn’t running around to any guy, no matter the case or issues. He wasn't close to Will. He wouldn't be, knowing how things went.

“Connections come quickly.” Hannibal noted with a hint of a smirk. Will watched his mouth a little, then looked back down.

“*Associations*, Dr. Lecter, come quickly. So do forts.” He grumbled. Connections evaded him. Lecter’s shoes were far too perfect.

Hannibal leaned closer, “No connections then. Not fond of eye contact, are you?”

Will scoffed. Basic antics. Hannibal shouldn't feel good for noticing the obvious. He looked up, staring dead into Hannibal’s maroon eyes. “Eyes are distracting. You see too much, you don't see enough. And it's- it's hard to focus when you're thinking, ‘oh, those whites are really white’ or 'Is that a burst vein?’ Or um, 'they just look so familiar...’ so yes, Dr. Lecter. I avoid eyes whenever possible.”

He dropped his eyes to his own shoes now. They looked as worn out as he felt. He felt the killer close to him, like seeing him in the corner of his eye. He knew if he looked, nothing would be there.

“I imagine what you see and learn touches everything else in your mind. Your values and decency are present yet shocked at your associations, appalled at your dreams.” Lecter watched him. Will wanted to hide from the attention. He continued, not relenting, “No forts in the bone area of your skull for the things you desire.”

Desire. Will tensed. He didn't desire Hannibal. What he desired, at that time, was a bit of connection. Oh. Connection. Hannibal was good.

“Who's profile are you working on?!” Will's head snapped up to Jack, “Who's profile is he working on?”

“I'm sorry Will.” Hannibal noted with no hint of apology in his tone, “Observing is what we do. I can't shut mine off any more than you can yours.”

Will tensed. What did Hannibal see in him in the bedroom.? Not enough to run screaming. But it would have been enough to be frightened. It was hardly even Will he took home that night. He was a good profiler. Did he see Will then? He must have know he wasn’t in his right mind. The thought disturbed him.

He checked his watch, “I have to go. I've got a lecture to give. On psychoanalyzing.” He hurried out, not sure he could stand being in that room anymore. He heard Hannibal and Jack talking as he went, most likely about him. Focusing on him. Like he was the one who murdered those girls.

He didn't have great control over himself some days, but he at least knew he didn't kill them.

Will showered off the sweat. His hands were still shaking from the dreams, how it felt to mount the girl. To take her organs. It felt good. No. It felt good to the killer, and he was mirroring that. That was all.

He threw on a dry shirt and boxers, and tried to get his heart rate down with steady breathing. A sharp knock at the door spiked it again. Will considered his lack of real clothes before considering his lack of care. If Jack wanted something this early he could deal.

Instead, he opened the door to Hannibal. He stood, immaculately dressed, holding a container and smiling pleasantly. Will scowled.

Hannibal ignored it, “Good morning Will. May I come in?”

“Where's Crawford.”

“Deposed in court. The adventure today will be yours and mine. May I come in?”

Will frowned. A more whimsical part of himself saw Hannibal as a vampire, waiting to be invited in before ripping out Will's heart. The blood would no doubt stain Hannibal’s jacket as he sucked it from the hole in his chest. He smiled to himself a little at the thought.

“Is it a joke I would enjoy?” Hannibal smiled, leaning into Will's personal space.

“Not really. Come on in.” He sighed and put on coffee. He didn’t really want to have to entertain the other man, but he was too useful to this case. Hannibal sat at the dining room table. Will took his time pouring two mugs and sitting down.

Hannibal sat down his container, “I'm very careful what I put into my body, which means I end up preparing most meals myself.”

Will wanted to roll his eyes, but maintained the illusion of respect.

“A little protein scramble to start the day. Some eggs. Some sausage.” Hannibal plated two, surprising Will a little. It made him feel embarrassed for writing him off. Will figured this would far beat the boiled egg he planned on grabbing from the store.

Will dug in. As it hit his stomach he realized how hungry he was. He took another shovelling bite and nodded his approval, “It's delicious. Thank you.”

“My pleasure.” Hannibal watched him pushed the fork into his mouth. Will felt the gaze. He felt the meaning in the gaze. He couldn’t just keep ignoring this.

He swallowed the mouthful and looked up. Not quite at Hannibal, not quite anywhere else, “So, we, uh, have met before.”

“There's no need to be coy, it's only us two here.” Hannibal didn't quite smile. But he knew. It had at least been acknowledged.

“We fucked.” Will said.

“There's no need to be crude either.” Hannibal sighed.

“And when Crawford asked you to hold my leash did you know about that? Find it worth mentioning?”

“Jack didn't-”

“Don't bullshit me.” Will nearly flinched to see Hannibal’s displeasure at being interrupted. He decided to himself not to do it again. He knew it was rude and he didn’t often care. But he felt the need to be careful here. To tread lightly on his transgressions.

Hannibal sighed, “I would apologize for my analytical ambush, but I know I will soon be apologizing again and you'll tire of that eventually, so I'll have to consider using apologies sparingly.”

Will gave a brief pause, “Just keep it professional.”

“Or we could socialize like adults.”

“We've already had adult socializing,” Will said blankly, “I've definitely had enough.”

“God forbid we act friendly.” Hannibal responded, not amused with Will's euphemisms, but not too offended by them.

Will took another mouthful, certain the eggs were free range. Not by taste but because he could tell this man would have no less, “I don't find you that interesting.”

“You will.”

There was something in Hannibal’s expression. Will saw it briefly the night they shared. Something almost like potential. Will didn't want to look deeper into it. He knew he’d see the same potential in the mirror and he banished the thought.

Hannibal switched the subject, “Agent Crawford tells me you have a knack for the monsters.”

“Monsters?” Will raised an eyebrow, “They're people. Just like you and me.”

“Just like you and me.” Hannibal smiled, “Who then, of us, left the girl in the field?”

Will's arm twitched a little. Her flesh was cold but it gave way so easy. He could feel it. He could smell the fur of the stag. It wasn't an emotional killing. No. All killings were emotional. It wasn't the shrike. He voiced this thought.

Hannibal smiled like a teacher who was given a correct answer. Will didn't like feeling like a student to him, but this was helping his thoughts, so he stuck with it.

“The devil is in the details. What didn't your copycat do to the girl in the field? What gave it away?”

“Everything.” Will shook his head. He felt himself slipping into the skin of the killer. It was cozy. Familiar. And he did not leave the girl in the field, “It's like he had to show me the negative for me to see the positive. That scene was practically gift wrapped.”

Will would never display her like that. He would not treat the body in that manner. These girls were precious to him. He loved them. He needed them to stay with him. No. Not these girls. His girl. One. He hadn’t killed her yet and he wouldn’t. If she stayed.

Hannibal spoke. Will only caught the last sliver. “-reconstructing his fantasies?”

Will gave a soft laugh. He could smell their hair. The scent sweeter and stronger than the fur of the stag. Their skin sliding open with the knife.

“What kind of problems does he have?” Hannibal probed.

Will felt interviewed. He couldn't let her leave. If he consumed her, fed on her organs, she would be his forever. Will made himself speak. “He, uh, he has a few.”

“Do you ever have any problems Will?”

“No.” Will felt a bit more himself. Hannibal made a good tether. He finished his coffee.

“Of course you don’t. You and I are just alike. Nothing about us to feel guilty about.” He gave a knowing smile. Suddenly Will didn't feel as much like Hannibal was against him.

Will had seen a lot of blood. Mostly through his career. The dark blood of the veins. The lighter arterial blood. He’d seen blood mixed with far too many other bodily fluids for his

pleasure. He thought about forensics taking samples from hardwood and carpet, off of walls and furniture. From hair, underneath fingernails. Sometimes from the mouth, but that was very tricky, he was once told.

Will focused on this as he cleaned flecks of Abigail Hobbs' blood off himself. It stopped his hands from shaking as badly. He showered slowly, not sure if he could handle anything done rushed right now.

Will almost slipped when he turned the shower head off. In the hiss of the water he heard Garret Jacob Hobbs' voice. *See? See?*

He didn't want to see. He didn't know what he was seeing. He knew. He didn't want to know. He felt the recoil in his hand and the bullet in his chest. He felt his hand holding the knife to Abigail's throat, his own desperation to stop her from going.

Will dried off. It didn't help the sweat. He took a handful of painkillers to stop the throbbing before getting in his car and heading to the hospital. He knew he shouldn't drive. He wasn't going to call a taxi. His phone rang. He ignored it. He didn't need more of people checking if he was okay. He needed Abigail to be okay.

The nurse saw him coming. He felt her pity, her sadness. Will was grateful to whoever gave the warning that he would be coming. He didn't want to struggle of convincing the doctors that he needed to see her. The nurse plastered on a smile and directed him the right way.

Worry crossed his mind that there was blood on his face. He didn't look in the mirror before he left. He knew whose face he would see. He couldn't handle that. He ran a hand over his cheeks, trying to be subtle in his check. He felt like Lady Macbeth. He felt the warm spray again.

Will walked in slowly, quiet. He knew what he would see and he still had to see it. Abigail, bandaged and breathing through machines. He felt detached as he came in the room.

He didn't expect to see Hannibal sitting by the bedside. The man was asleep. If Will had any sense, he would be too. If Will could hide from the nightmares, he would be too. He sat down, not wanting to wake the man. He knew Abigail would sleep soundly, undoubtedly medicated.

Will thought about Hannibal, watching his sleeping form. Some part of him wanted to end the day in his bed. Hannibal felt safe. He didn't know if his interest was sexual, romantic, or completely platonic. But after today, he knew he trusted the man, knew he could find solace in him.

He imagined he had the same sense of responsibility towards Abigail that Will did. Or at least something like it. Hannibal's was less likely aided by a connection to her deceased father.

They'd lived through this together, the three of them. He closed his eyes for a moment, feeling almost at peace.

November

Chapter Notes

> Sorry updates are taking forever. Don't really have wifi 24/7 right now. Chapter isn't quite where I wanted it to be but if I didn't post it now, I was never going to.

Will took a deep slow breath, waiting on the other side of the door for a moment. Maybe this was a horrible idea.

Jack had sent him to Hannibal for an eval. Will probably would have preferred Alana Bloom for it, but Jack cited their relationship as too personal. Will's ears rung with the thought of what Jack's reaction might be if he knew about his little tryst with Hannibal. Jack made it very clear he didn't see much of a line between Will's work and personal life. Will didn't think there was much of one. His subconscious definitely didn't.

In concept, an evaluation was not a completely horrible idea. But it wouldn't make Jack happy to know Will was in anything but top shape. Even before Hobbs, he was damaged goods at best.

Will sighed and opened the door, going in. The air conditioning was running, keeping the office cold. Will found it an interesting choice. Warmth would make patients feel more comfortable.

He looked down at Hannibal, who was smiling patiently with paper in hand. Will noted how his smile didn't quite reach his eyes most times. He dropped his gaze to the paper, “What's that?”

“Your psychological evaluation. You are totally functional and more or less sane. Well done.” The smile extended.

Will frowned. “Did you just rubber stamp me? Not very ethical, Dr. Lecter.”

“Not for your sake. Jack may lay his weary head to rest knowing he didn't break you, and our conversation can proceed unobstructed by paperwork.”

“What is there to have a conversation about?” Will leaned against the railing, skimming the covers of Hannibal’s books. He figured by the titles over half weren't in English.

“Jack believes you need therapy.”

“I've got that. And you cleared me. Is there something you think I need?” Will bit his lip a little, pissed at himself for how presumptuous the question sounded.

“A way out of dark places when you are sent there.”

“I was in a dark place during our first... Meeting.”

“I realize that now. What drew you out?”

Will turned, narrowing his eyes, “What happened then was... It was a one time thing. And it was a bad decision. And if I have to say this again, I'll have Alana do my bullshit paperwork.”

Hannibal waited patiently for Will to finish, “I was not insinuating we have physical relations. But connections, physical and emotional seem to anchor you. You seem to have emerged from your latest dark place with a lasting one.”

“Abigail. You were there too. You saved her life.” Will rubbed his forehead. They'd both spent their share of time at her bedside. Will still saw her choking on her own blood in his sleep.

“We both did. I was not the one to pull the trigger on Hobbs, but-”

“But you kept her from bleeding out.” Will nodded. Hannibal being the angel of mercy to Will's merchant of death. “I just orphaned her. Different kind of responsibility.”

Hannibal set the paper on his desk. Will wondered why he had held it so long. It relaxed him to see it put down.

“But Abigail is alive because of you. She would be worse off in that situation should her father have lived.” Hannibal reassured.

Will looked at the lines on his knuckles, hands still shaky at times from the ghost of the recoil. Hobbs wouldn't go down. He kept shooting but he wouldn't go down. He tightened his grip on the bannister. “Is this therapy or a support group?”

“It is whatever you need it to be.” Hannibal glanced at his hands but made no comment, “And, Will, the mirrors in your mind can reflect the best of yourself, not the worst of others.”

Will scoffed quietly. The best of himself wasn't all that good. Useful, yes. But morally, not quite good. “Is that what drew you to me? Did you see the best or worst of yourself in me?”

“I wasn't the one you were reflecting. Not then and not now.” Hannibal said. Will hated the easy control in his tone. He wouldn't allow himself to be as uncomfortable with the subject as Will clearly was.

“And who,” he swallowed, “Who am I reflection now?”

“We both know the answer to that.”

Freddie Lounds spotted him the moment she arrived on the scene. Will Graham. Ad revenue on the past two articles she did containing information on him had a 10% spike in ad revenue

compared to other similar stories. Social media engagement on his stories was good as well. He declined her previous requests for an interview, fairly rudely.

And here he was on the field again. Nothing grabbed attention like a unique mind. She could include him in her coverage. Link and get click throughs to her other stories on him. It was like the FBI gave her a gift.

Freddie her way easily through, moving closer, playing the concerned parent. When she first started working, the sight of the decomposing bodies would have shaken her. She wasn't as sensitive now.

She watched as the forensics workers cleared the area and Graham knelt by a body. He wasn't examining, or taking samples. He spoke quietly, seemingly to himself.

“I think your family's leaving,” the detective spoke, breaking her focus, but not Graham's.

“We drove separately.” She muttered. Her last two articles played him off as somewhat of a genius, a savant. But she smelled a new angle. A troubled mind. Perhaps an evil one.

A few hours later, she knew just how to find out what she needed.

A day later, Freddie sat in Dr. Lecter’s waiting room, grateful for two things: thin walls and the extra money she had spent on a better recorder. She could make a lot of money off of Will Graham. Two different articles. One expanding on the deaths with the fungus, adding all the information Will was giving, and another about him.

She was nearly shocked he was allowed to be working. Hallucinations, guilt, and way too close a connection with the killers he hunted. It wouldn't be hard for her to write about him.

Will Graham was talking about connections through the soil with mushrooms. About connections he made with others. He seemed to have much more confidence in the mushrooms.

Days cycled into weeks, weeks into months. Will felt some creep by and some slip. At nights the hours passed like decades, waiting for and fearing sleep. Yet he found himself losing time again, memory sliding from him. Each crime spiraled into the next, a constant horror show for Will to sit ready for. He kept a smile on his face for Jack, trying to be good.

He visited Abigail when he was able and allowed. Jack didn't think it was good for either of them. Alana approved. The connection helped keep Will afloat sometimes. It made him feel like he wasn't too far gone.

Hannibal started feeling more like a friend and therapist. He never acknowledged their first meeting unless Will brought it up. Will didn't often, unless necessary. Neither of them mentioned it when Will found himself having travelled in his sleep to Hannibal’s home. He was grateful for that. Hannibal offered him breakfast and nothing else.

Despite how he wanted to feel in the day time, Will found Hannibal in his dreams far too often. Choking on his own blood. Buried in the ground. Slashed open. And then in the same night, pressed close to Will. His tongue sliding into his mouth. Their bodies pressed together.

Of all the problems Will had, erotic nightmares about his therapist was just another blip on the radar. But he decided not saying a word about it was best. It ate at him. It sickened him. Hannibal didn't deserve to be the subject of such thoughts. But they were only getting worse.

Will felt close to the angel maker. He related with him, not as he did to most killers. He felt the same righteousness, the same fear. Some nights he woke up sweating, certain his killer opened his eyes in the same moment.

Will found himself waking and sleeping in worse habit lately. He wondered if angels at his bed would bring him rest. For a moment he saw Hannibal's ribs broken back and spread as wings. Will shook away the thought and looked up at the man, standing fine, ribs very much where they should be.

"Are you with me Will?" Hannibal said, gentle, tilting his head a little.

"Uh," Will blinked, hearing the crunch of bone, "Yeah, sorry, what was that?"

"Have you determined how this angel maker is choosing his victims?"

"He doesn't see people how others see them," Will gave a tiny smile, "He can tell if they've been naughty or nice. Or at least thinks he can."

He wondered why the mind of this killer had him lay his hands on Hannibal. The man hadn't been the subject of such thoughts for many cases. How would he see Hannibal? Is there something Will didn't see? He saw Hannibal knelt at the foot of his bed.

"You're not unlike this killer." Hannibal noted, confirming Will's fears.

"Oh? You've been reading Tattlecrime? Think it takes a killer to catch one?" He paced over to the black statue of a stag, feeling distaste, not settled by looking at the decoration. He knew Hannibal read the garbage site. Not the time to voice he protest but he did regardless.

Hannibal ignored it, clear with the intention to not argue, "You crave sweet and easy peace. As does the angel maker."

"Well he's not getting it. Neither of us are." Will shook his head. He bit the inside of his cheek, pain grounding him in the moment.

"You accept the impossibility of this peace. The angel maker is still chasing it." Hannibal neared him, "If he got close to the feeling, he would looked for it again."

Hannibal pressed on top of him, thrusting. His hands around Hannibal's throat. Hannibal's body broken, knelt before Will as he slept. Will had been close to some feeling. He wouldn't chase it. That was nothing but mutually assured destruction.

Will looked at the stag, focusing. This wasn't him. This was about the killer. Not himself. Not Hannibal.

“I've been reconstructing his thinking.” Will muttered, “Finding patterns.”

“Instead you find yourself in a behavior pattern you can't break. You realize you have a choice.”

Will frowned. He felt pretty barren of any form of choice right now. He'd work for Jack. He'd push himself until someone got hurt too bad. Until someone who didn't deserve it got hurt too bad. Then Jack would shove him to the back of the shelf. Will gave a desolute sigh, “A choice?”

“The angel maker will be destroyed by what's going on in his head. You don't have to be.” Hannibal said.

Maybe I'm not the one who will be destroyed, Hannibal. Will thought. But before he could speak, he saw movement in the corner of his eye, all the sudden far too aware that Hannibal was close behind him.

“Did you just smell me?”

“Difficult to avoid.” Hannibal didn't let up, still too close to Will, “I really must introduce you to a finer aftershave. Yours smells like-”

Will didn't realize how tense he was about Hannibal until he snapped, anger sweeping across the broken surface. He turned around, forcing himself to look Hannibal in the eyes, “I don't find you attractive.”

“You wound me.” Hannibal looked more or less surprised, only slightly genuinely insulted.

“What we did was a total mistake. I don't think of you like that. You're not attractive to me and I'm not gay.” He lost the nerve for eye contact, just frustrated. Despite what his body did when he slipped into the minds of others, he knew where his attraction lay.

“Will, sexuality is-”

“I’m not bisexual either. If you give me some bullshit Kinsey scale affirmation, god as my witness, I'll-” Will stopped himself. Choke him with his belt. Snap his ribs. Impale him in Hobbs’ cabin.

“I had hoped we moved past this.” Hannibal sighed. Will felt embarrassed by Hannibal’s disappointment. “I consider you a patient as well as a friend.”

“Then stop coming on to me.” He said, bitterness but no conviction in his tone.

“I must say, I'm sorry our small affair was so horrible that you are still dwelling on it. Should I start the paperwork for a referral?”

Will sighed, defeated, completely regretting what he said, “No. It's fine. You're fine. I just... I haven't been sleeping much and...”

Hannibal nodded, “As I told you previously, sleepwalkers have difficulty handling aggression. Have you had this with others lately?”

Will nodded, sitting down, defeated, “Jack. I was... Disrespectful.”

“What triggered your anger? Now and then?”

“Then? Exhaustion. Jack pushed me and kept pushing and I just... I should have kept my mouth shut but...”

“And now?” Hannibal asked. Will swallowed. Hannibal’s reasonable reaction only made him feel worse and more off the deep end.

He shifted, then smirked, “You can't tell, Doctor? It's obviously a repressed attraction for my father formed in young childhood.”

Hannibal gave an almost impercievable laugh. The room felt lighter now. Will could breathe.

December

Chapter Notes

> Chapter contains some Will/Alana, but very little, less than is in the show itself. Just so you know.
>
> Also, Bryan Fuller can pry a scarred up Will Graham from my cold, dead hands. I want him mutilated and suffering like Thomas Harris intended.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will felt like he was choking. He sat, the deep and horrible melody playing in his skull. There was a presence beside him, and without looking, he knew who it was exactly.

See?

Will looked up to the stage. The player was cloaked in shadows. Will could almost make out his face. Hannibal sat, head thrown back, throat opened as the killer played his vocal chords. The vibrations carried out.

Will looked down. He was on the stage now,pulling the neck of the cello out of his throat. The corpse made a noise. Not from the pull of Will's bow, but of his own volition. He was struggling. That wouldn't do. Hannibal's maroon eyes stared up. Will put his hand over the line of his throat.

And then he was in the kitchen again, hand on Abigail's throat as she sputtered up blood. Will could feel it filling his own mouth, taste the copper of it. Garret Jacob Hobbs whispered, his blood pooling dark out on the floor.

Hannibal had his hand on Will's throat now, staunching the bleeding as best he could. *See?* Will whispered as Hannibal knelt close, kissing up his jaw. Will could see Hannibal as they pressed together, in Will's home now. Their throats both opened, bodies closed against one another.

Will jerked up, panting. He sweat through the towels he laid out. He sat up fully, disgusted with the realization of the weight between his legs. He ignored it, moving for a shower to move the blood away from there and to rinse off the sweat.

The ice cold water bit his skin. He wanted desperately to stop having these thoughts and dreams, to stop feeling like this. But it was only getting worse.

Being around Alana was nice, Will decided. He knew it, but he was certain now, as she pretended Will actually heard something in the chimney. They both knew. Will scrambled for

the idea. He heard something, sure. But nothing was really there.

“At least it got out?” She offered, looking at the piles of broken brick

“What are you doing out?” He gave an awkward attempt at changing the subject. He really wanted Alana to think he was somewhat sane. He figured he was attracted to her. It felt normal. Not like Hannibal.

“Thought I'd make some noise and shoo away any predators at your door.” She noted. Ah. She knew there was no animal then too. “But it seems you were making enough noise yourself.”

Why had it taken him so long? Alana was always nice to him. She was gorgeous, but that was a given. They had good conversations. He played them over in his mind quickly while Alana nudged a brick with her foot.

“You avoided being in a room alone with me, essentially since we met.” He arrived at the conclusion, “You were smooth about it though.”

“Apparently not smooth enough.” She confessed.

“And now you're making house calls.” He noted. Was she attracted to him?

“Just stopping by. On my way home. Since you're not my patient.”

Will considered that taxonomy. Not “a friend.” But “not my patient.” It left a lot of questions to be answered. Will didn't need answers. He needed something to cling to. He needed to feel normal and okay.

He cupped Alana's face and kissed her. She was soft. Sweet. His desperation for emotional stability reminded him too much of kissing Hannibal. He tried to not think of that. She kissed back, and Will felt safe.

Then she pulled away, “I'm confused.”

“You have to stop thinking so much.” Will said, knowing how flimsy that was.

“I can't... Do this. Not with you. I mean,” she frowned, “I didn't mean it like that, I just.... The way I am isn't compatible with...”

“With the way I am?” He said, tiredly.

“I wouldn't be good for you. You wouldn't be good for me. Us together wouldn't be good for either of us.”

Will nodded, hurt, as she continued.

“I have a professional curiosity about you. I wouldn't be able to stop analyzing you.”

“Hasn't stopped others.” He noted, trying not to sound like he was brooding.

She paused and looked up at him with concern, “Are you saying... Have you had relationships with your psychiatrists before?”

“You're not my psychiatrist. And I don't really do relationships, remember?” He avoided the question, hoping she didn't notice how he did. He didn't want to lie to her.

She studied him for a long moment. “If I was your psychiatrist, my advice to you would be... Don't do this. Whatever this is. I have to follow that advice.” She paused, would full of concern for Will he felt nauseous. “I’m going to go ahead and go now.”

“Goodnight Alana.” Will said. He wanted to apologise, but he knew that would make it worse. He didn't want pity from her. He didn't need to kiss her. He just needed something to hang on to. He was slipping quickly.

He didn't realize he was driving until he took the turn into Hannibal's driveway. His hands shook hard. He stared at the house for a long while, scared of what brought him here. He considered leaving, but he needed to talk. He got out, pacing up and ringing the doorbell, out of his element.

Hannibal opened, wearing curiousity that shifted to concern.

“I kissed Alana Bloom.” Will blurted out, feeling guilty even as he said it, followed by anger at his own guilt. He shook the rain off his jacket and set it on a hook, not remembering when he put it on.

“Come in.” Hannibal blinked. Will could feel his annoyance. Hannibal called him a mirror. Will wanted to smash it, wanted to stop feeling everything so deeply. He wanted to feel something real.

Will blinked, following Hannibal into his dining room. Two plates set half finished. Will didn't see or hear anyone else, “You have a guest?”

“A colleague. Just left, urgent business, I'm afraid. Had to leave suddenly.” He picked the plates up. Will wondered if Hannibal ever worked as a waiter. He couldn't imagine it. “Lucky for you I have dessert for two.”

Will nodded, moving to his kitchen. He felt comfortable, watching Hannibal’s skilled hands at work. Hannibal kept focused, “Did you bring me this news as a friend, a patient, or a former lover?”

“Patient.” Will thought it over, “And friend. Both, but just not the last. Don't call us that.”

“Understood.” Hannibal set whipped cream atop a pudding dish, “What was her reaction?”

“She, ah, said she wouldn't be good for me and I wouldn't be good for her.” Will grit his teeth a little at it. He relaxed minutely at the smell of dessert, always amazed at Hannibal’s skill.

“I don't disagree.” He looked up at Will, “She would feel an obligation to her field to observe you. You would resent her for it. You certainly hold resentment towards me for our pairing.”

“I know.” Will muttered, not in the mood to get lectured because he couldn't stop thinking of their night. He didn't say it, but he knew it showed.

“Wondering then why you kissed her and then drove an hour in the snow to tell me about it.” He noted. Will envied how Hannibal could keep his voice so free of judgement. He was certainly judging himself pretty heavily. Hannibal should too.

Will considered it for a long while. He looked at the clock. An hour drive, at least, with no memory. He looked up at Hannibal, staring a bit past him, “I'm losing my balance.”

“And clutching to Alana would help you keep it?”

Will swallowed, weighing his words for a steady moment before giving a confession, “If I'm not careful, I'll pull you down with me.”

“Will.”

He stared at the clock on the wall. “I know what I do isn't good for me. But I'm good for it. And I guess that means I'm not good for certain relationships.”

“Do you hear this killers serenade behind your eyes?”

Will nodded. It was low and sweet. The sound was glorious. He didn't know how to play, no, but it wasn't his hands guiding the bow. He saw Hannibal’s throat sectioned open. He was lean. He would be good. Play well.

“Will?”

Will jerked his head up. He was standing behind Hannibal. The man had turned to look at him. Will stuck his hands in his pocket and stepped back, feeling sick. Hannibal seemed to evaluate him silently, and came to a decision.

“I hesitate to tell you this, as it borders on a violation of doctor-patient confidentiality. A patient today told me he suspects his friend may be involved with the murder at the symphony.”

Will sat back down, disappointed to see he finished his dessert without remembering the last bite, “What did he say about his friend?”

“He owns a music store in Baltimore, specializing in string instruments. Perhaps you should interview him.”

Will felt a soft pang at the look of relief on Hannibal’s face when he walked in the office.

He couldn't help but feel guilty about this. He failed to kill Tobias, and now Hannibal was hurt. Will may as well have attacked the man himself. There was no question about it, he was bad for Hannibal. He looked at the statue of the stag, mind reeling, seeing what had happened.

The stitches on his face stung when he gave a fake smile, coming up to Hannibal.

Hannibal looked at him, still smiling gently, “I feared you were dead.”

Will made a vague gesture to the lines marking his face, “You had reason to fear.”

Jack looked at Hannibal’s injuries, “Tobias kills two Baltimore PD officers, slices up Graham's face trying to kill him, and after all that, his first stop is your office?”

“He came to kill my patient.”

Will felt the weight of that man's death as well. What he had disclosed to Hannibal, what Hannibal then to Will, caused this. “Your patient, is that who he was serenading?” Will asked, knowing it wasn't somehow.

“I don't know.” Hannibal sighed.

“Could your patient have been involved in what Tobias was doing?” Jack eyed the bodies being carried out.

“It seemed to me more like a simple matter of poor choice in friends.”

Will felt stung deeply by that. He looked away, the bodies more comforting to see than his wounded friend.

“Doesn’t seem simple to me.” Jack said gruffly, going with the bodies as they were wheeled out.

And then Will and Hannibal were alone. He felt staggering obligation. He moved close, taking a bit of gauze from the medicine kit and dabbing blood from Hannibal’s forehead. He noticed Hannibal noticing the lines in his face, carved by piano wire. After a long moment, Will spoke, “I feel like I've dragged you into my world.”

“I arrived here on my own.” Hannibal moved his hand to Will's, pulling it away a little, but keeping it in his own.

“And what do you think of it?” Will muttered, suddenly aware of how alone they were, how close they sat. Hannibal’s hand was warm on his, still cupping it close to his face.

“I appreciate your company.” Hannibal's voice was soft. He leaned a little closer to him.

Will took a long second before closing the gap and brushing their lips together gently. It felt right, the way they slotted. Relief washed over him as Hannibal returned the kiss, dropping Will's hand in favor of cupping his jaw.

They both broke off and moved away quickly at the sound of footsteps. Will's heart beat loud in his chest. Some part of him wanted to overthink this. But more so he was, like Hannibal, deeply grateful for the company.

Jack came back in to the office, “Graham, let's go.”

Will gave a glance to Hannibal, then a friendly smile. He couldn't say anything now, but that said enough.

Alana knew something was happening.

She didn't want to believe it at first. With her trust in Abigail slipping in the wake of Nick Boyle's death, she wanted to keep her faith in Will. She found it difficult, given the lack of faith he had in himself.

Yesterday, Will stepped out of the morgue, pulling away from the dissembled totem pole. Alana saw him leave and went to follow, to be sure he was alright.

But through the doorways, she saw Hannibal had beat her to it. It made her smile at first, to see him comforting Will, to see Will relax.

Then Hannibal put a gentle hand on the side of his face. Will didn't recoil, like he usually did upon physical contact he didn't initiate himself. Instead he leaned into the touch, smiling softly, and pressed an almost indiscernible kiss to Hannibal's palm.

That was all she needed to see to know. She was at a loss. She wished she followed up Will's comment before, "Hasn't stopped others." But she didn't want to broach that. She should have.

Alana composed herself a bit, moving to the doorway of Will's classroom. He was talking to the empty seats, discussing the current case. His face still held the lines from piano wire, pale scar tissue shining under the harsh florescent light. She stepped closer. "Will?"

His eyes jerked to her. She saw the disorientation. She wondered if he knew the hall was empty, and decided to give him a way out, allowing some dignity, "I didn't want to interrupt if you were rehearsing?"

Relief flooded his eyes, but they both knew he wasn't. "No, no, it's okay."

She looked at the lack of lighting, "Very moody in here."

"That's me all over." He joked poorly. He sounded exhausted. He shifted, then looked down, "Come in. I promise I won't try to kiss you again."

"I'm not worried about that, Will."

"What are you worried about?"

"You and Hannibal."

Beverly Katz once made a comment about how Will would be the worst to play poker with, that he'd probably be able to read you easily. Alana disagreed. He was easier to read than he let on. His guilt read like notes on the staff of his face.

He swallowed, "Come in then. Shut the door."

She shut and locked it. She moved up and leaned beside him against his desk. He wouldn't have to look at her, not that he would anyways. This was less confrontational. She decided to go worst case scenario. Will would tell her more that way. “Is he abusing you?”

“What? No.” Will blinked, “What?”

“You're not stable. You are, to some effect, in his care. There's a reason that sort of relationship is unethical.” She sighed, “I don't even want to believe Hannibal would do something like it but...”

“He's not raping me, if that's what you're asking.” Will scoffed, “We're not even having sex now.”

She turned her head, “Now?”

“It's a long story.”

“I have time.”

“It's a story I don't want to tell.”

“You can tell me, and I might keep quiet about it all, or I can tell Jack what I think is happening.” She felt bad saying that, but she needed Will to understand how serious this was.

“Blackmail, Alana? Really?” He sighed.

“When did it start?” She tried a different angle, just needing the truth. She sent Will to Hannibal. If Will was hurt by him, it was her fault. Will would never say so, but she felt it.

“Uh, late June? No, early July.”

She blinked, “You met Hannibal in October.”

“Not... Really.” He sighed. Alana listened patiently as he gave a condensed version of his real first meeting with Hannibal. She gave no comment or judgement as Will spoke. She could tell he needed it off his chest. As he answered some of the questions in her head, new ones formed. Half about the kind of person Hannibal really was. Half about Will's state of mind. She felt a little strange for the kiss she and Will shared earlier, and grateful for having put a stop to it.

“And since then it's just been... A thing. He comforts me, Alana. He makes me happy. I don't know what else to say. It's only been a few kisses here and there really. He's not abusing me, he's just... Keeping me grounded.”

“He's your therapist, Will.”

“I know. I... I know.” He sighed softly, “Please don't tell Jack.”

“I won't.” She said. She was never really going to. Will didn't need to know that. She felt in need of grounding herself. She had said Abigail didn't kill Boyle, basing her reasoning in

Hannibal's character. Now she doubted that too. She let the silence sit for just a moment.

"Hannibal doesn't... Go to bars and hook up with people." She looked at Will, more interested in his reaction than whatever answer he could find.

His face said that he had been wondering about that aspect too. She believed that Will believed his story was true. There was everything in his favor. But that detail didn't add up.

Will nodded, "He doesn't... I still don't understand. I would feel stupid asking him about it but..."

"Trust is an important thing."

"I'll ask."

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it." He gave her another awkward, forced smile, his shallow attempts to hide fear with poor humor, "You're not half bad at this. You'd make a decent psychiatrist."

She smiled back, giving him that one.

Will never asked.

He entered the office, hands shaking. He felt the blood of Nick Boyle on them, but when he looked down he saw nothing. It reminded him far too much of the first night he spent by Abigail's bed in the hospital, he and Hannibal flanked on each side to keep away the nightmares.

Alana was right. Trust was an important thing.

Hannibal sat at his desk, smiling pleasantly as Will entered. Will didn't give him the chance to speak, "Abigail Hobbs killed Nick Boyle."

"Yes, I know. I helped her dispose of the body."

"Apparently not well enough." Will felt a coldness in his gut. Hannibal wasn't quite the man he thought he was. Will didn't know who held the knife anymore.

"Have you told Jack Crawford?"

"No."

"Are you going to?"

Will went quite. Abigail would be jailed. Charged as an adult for first degree murder. Self defense wouldn't matter, not given her family history. Will shook his head, "Jack would hang her for what her father did. The world would burn her in his place. Was it really even self defense?"

Hannibal nodded as Will drew closer to the desk, “Everything you know about that night is true, except the end. Abigail is no more a murderer than you are for shooting her father, or I am for the death of Tobias Budge.”

“It's not our place to decide.” Will shook his head, vision swimming a little.

“If not ours then whose? Who knows Abigail better than you or I? Or the burden she bears? We are her fathers now. We must care for her better than Garret Jacob Hobbs.”

Hannibal stood on the other side of his drawing table. Will looked over to him. He didn't let his eyes drop to it, but he was well aware of the scalpel Hannibal used to sharpen his pencils. He set his hand on the table to it, keeping it closer to himself.

“If Abigail is to have the life she deserves, we must tell no one.” Hannibal paused, placing his hand on the phone, “Are we in agreement? Or shall I call my lawyers?”

“Put the phone down.” Will grabbed the scalpel and swept over to the other side of the table, facing Hannibal. Their eyes locked. Will grabbed Hannibal by the collar, shocked by the lack of fear in his eyes. Will raised the scalpel.

Chapter End Notes

Didn't expect to write that so quickly, but it's written. Next one probably won't come as soon, apologies.

Equinox

Chapter Notes

> Thanks everyone for the kids and comments! This is probably the chapter you've been waiting for.

Will sliced through Hannibal's tie and shirt, blade just barely grazing the skin. Sharp as it was, it left a thin line of red in it's wake. Will dipped his head and licked at the blood, frenzied. Hannibal groaned as Will tore off the rest of his shirt.

Will traced the scalpel down his chest again, "I've had dreams about killing you."

"I assumed as much." Hannibal wore a smile. Will wondered how much alike they really were. It was more than he thought before, definitely.

"And about fucking you."

"Oh?"

"No. About, uh, about being fucked by you."

Hannibal shrugged off his jacket and hung it on the back of his chair. The shirt was torn open. Will wanted to tear it off completely. He wondered how expensive it was before deciding he really didn't care.

Hannibal leaned close, still holding his gaze, "And which of those do you plan to do now, having your concept of my innocent gone?"

Will dropped the scalpel and kissed Hannibal deeply, full of passion, the force of every one of his repressed desires and dreams splashing over the brim. He tangled his hands in Hannibal's hair, groaning as the other man slid his tongue into his mouth. Will tugged Hannibal closer, leaning against the table.

Hannibal pulled gently away, looking at the drawings, "I will be very unhappy if those smudge."

Will gave a small, irritated sigh, then nipped Hannibal's jaw, then kissed the same place, "You killed a man in this office. I can still catch glimpses of it sometimes, during our sessions."

"You kissed me afterwards. Does the thought of my near-death arouse you?"

“It’s not arousal. It’s... attraction. It's... Complicated.” Will was cold with guilt at Hannibal’s assessment. Anyone else would have run screaming after everything Will had done. He wanted to cling to Hannibal harder since he stayed.

“Then I will treat you to something far less complicated.” He grabbed Will, moving him to the chaise lounge. Will was surprised with the ease Hannibal carried him. He wrapped his legs around Hannibal, the press making him aware of his growing arousal.

Hannibal laid on top of him, the pressure keeping him sealed in the present moment. He kissed Will again, taking control now. Will surrendered easily, feeling safer pinned by the other man's weight, knowing he couldn't hurt him if his mind slipped again.

Hannibal opened Will's shirt with care, undoing each button slowly, kissing down his chest as he went. Will made a soft noise, shocked by the gentleness. He half expected Hannibal to take his shirt off and fold it before setting it aside.

Instead he moved down, talking off Will's shoes before sliding off his pants off. Before, Will might have felt self conscious for his obvious erection. But he felt comfortable with Hannibal. He knew now, there was nothing he could do that would push him away.

And he felt Hannibal press against his thigh, confirming that his affections were returned. Will shuddered, thought racing.

Hannibal could see that in his eyes and pulled him into another kiss, pressing him flat on the lounge. He gave his hips a roll that made Will tense with excitement. His thoughts dissolved quickly into pure emotion.

Hannibal took off what was left of his shirt, and kicked his own pants off, kissing Will's neck. He was careful, carefuller than Will, to not leave any mark that could be seen. Will didn't notice this. All he focused on was the feeling of Hannibal; present, real, and wanting.

Will wanted to close his eyes, but found himself transfixed as Hannibal slid both their boxers down, touching them both. He was here. This was happening. No one was getting hurt.

He was surprised at his own voice, almost dreamy, “Are... Are we gonna...?”

“I don't keep lubricant at my office.” Hannibal pecked Will's lips, “But there are other ways of achieving shared pleasure.”

Will prickled with some irritation at Hannibal’s tone, the implication that he was that inexperienced. But his retort died in his throat as the other man stroked them both with a firm, large hand.

“Don't stop.” He found himself saying, “Don't, don't you dare...”

“I wouldn't dare miss watching you unravel.” Hannibal said, voice low.

They slid together, Will shaking and vulnerable. Hannibal in total control. Will panted, arching his back. Hannibal pressed closer, being certain Will could see him no matter the angle.

Will shivered and spilled himself into Hannibal's hand, who finished himself soon after. Their breath mingles as they both found themselves spiralling out of bliss and back to the real world, each grateful to find himself in the others arms.

Will touched the line of the cut he made. His apology died in his throat when he saw the look on Hannibal's face, something between lust an admiration. Will returned it, "I, uh-"

"Don't speak." Hannibal said, kind but firm, "Nothing you say will be as important as having you in my arms."

Will felt the weight of the statement, but was left uncertain on the meaning. He took it though, quieting as Hannibal held him for a long moment.

They grew closer as the weather grew colder still. They touched but not in the office again. Hannibal claimed he wanted it kept as a space of healing. Will forwent the chair, sitting in the lounge every session after, just to tease him.

Will caught Alana's concerned looks from time to time, but was certain she wouldn't say a thing. She joined them both once for dinner, and made no mention of it. Hannibal took Will on the table that evening, slow and brutal and everything he needed.

Will would sit in Hannibal's kitchen the next morning, wearing nothing but boxers, listening to him talk about how France was this time of year. Will felt his longing deeply.

Sometimes Will felt dangerous. He found himself holding too tightly to a steak knife, or his hands sneaking up to Hannibal's throat as their bodies rolled together. Hannibal stopped him every time, bringing him back to the moment. Will knew the fear his lover was missing should be a concern. But he was worried if he breached the topic, the entire relationship would shatter.

He found himself missing hours again, days sometimes. No one said anything. He was terrified, wondering who took control at those moments.

Soon enough, another case came along, pushing him further. He thought he felt how it was to murder the victims before. But opening his eyes to Beth Lebeau's face sliced cheek to cheek, that was another beast. It was realer than the others. Some moments it felt realer than shooting Garret Jacob Hobbs. Hobbs' ghost still haunted Will. He wasn't truly dead yet.

Will sat in the hospital room, still reeling. They had him on anti-inflammatory medication, hoping that would help before attempting surgery. Worries clouded every other moment.

Hannibal asked him to draw a clock. He drew a normal clock. He really thought he did. Hannibal took one look at it, eyes going wide. It was only slight, but it was enough for Will to know something was wrong.

He found himself getting treated in the same hospital as Georgia Madchen after her apprehension. He stopped by a few times, finding her still in medical coma. He was reminded

of Abigail.

Hannibal sent him to a neurologist who found extreme swelling in the right hemisphere. Encephalitis, he said.

Will almost cried in relief. It was a medical issue. It could be fixed. He didn't have to stay this way forever. He wasn't go off the deep end and he wasn't going to wake up to his lover's corpse beside him.

Jack made a brief stop by earlier that day. He seemed more worried about when Will could be out of the field again. Will promised him that he would be soon.

And he would. They would have him on an unreasonable amount of medicine, but he would be discharged and working again soon enough.

Hannibal knocked on the door. Will sat up with a soft smile, "Come on in."

The man looked like a kicked puppy as he found his way to Will's bedside. He looked him over before looking away, "I should have known sooner. It is my fault your condition worsened so-"

"Don't." Will took his hand, "It's fixed now. It'll take a while, just getting the medicine into my system, but I'm alive and I'm going to get better. Don't blame yourself for a moment."

Hannibal gave a warm smile and kissed Will's forehead, feeling the fever heat.

Even with the pills, a week later, Will worried this next one would do him in before he got to get better. Abel Gideon he could handle. The Ripper he couldn't. And Jack wanted him to find the Ripper if it meant losing Will.

Will voiced this fear to Hannibal one late night.

Hannibal frowned, "Losing you? In what way?"

Will looked out Hannibal's bedroom window. Dinner ran late into talking, and Will decided to stay the night, neighbor agreeing to run over and let out the dogs.

"Don't play dumb, Hannibal." He snapped, seeing movement outside. He knew it was nothing, "It's pretty obvious I'm still halfway to losing my mind, encephalitis or no."

"It's what you fear most." Hannibal noted. Will caught the dark reflection of him in the window. He gave him a tired look. He hated when Hannibal took the psychiatrist tone with him during their personal time.

Will decided to play along, still needing to talk, "I fear not knowing who I am. It's, it's what Abel Gideon is afraid of too. He's like a blind man, and Chilton got inside his head and moved all the furniture around."

“I imagine Gideon wants to draw out and find the Ripper to gauge who he is. And who he isn't.” He wrapped his arms around Will's back and held him close, “You have me as your gauge.”

Will ignored the stag in the reflection standing behind Hannibal. He turned his head and kissed the man slowly.

Hannibal kissed back slowly, hands splaying across Will's chest. Will arched into the touch, then turned, pushing Hannibal on the bed, crawling on top of him. He stared down at Hannibal, needing to find himself.

Will nodded and kissed again, deeper. Hannibal dropped his irritation and took Will. He was slow, but thorough. Will stayed on top for most of it, needing the illusion of control while knowing Hannibal was the one that really had it.

He laid beside him after, knowing exactly who he was. He thought over his words carefully before voicing them, staring up at the ceiling, “Have you ever been in love before?”

Hannibal considered for a moment before turning to Will, “Yes.”

“What was it like?”

“Much like this.”

Will smiled. The rest went unspoken. Neither man felt the need to say any more on the matter. Will wrapped his arm around Hannibal and drifted into sleep.

Breakfast was wonderful. A quiche with chorizo and spinach. Light and simple, but delicious. But Will felt a weight over the table the whole morning. He finished, then looked at Hannibal, “Okay. What aren't you telling me? Is this about what I said last night?”

“Not at all, my dear boy.” He reassured. Will was used to Hannibal saying it, still uncertain of being called a boy.

“Then what?”

“...With as much as it publishes content about you, you should really read Tattlecrime.”

Will rolled his eyes, dropping his cutlery on his plate with a clatter, “What? Lounds call me crazy again? I bet she thinks *I'm the Ripper at this point. Or at least she's writing it.”*

Hannibal’s expression didn't change as he opened his laptop and slid it in front of Will.

Will stomach lurched. He put his hand over his mouth to keep from losing his breakfast. The words on the webpage blurred. All he saw was a photo, taken through a window at night. Hannibal’s arms wrapped around him as they kissed. Last night.

He looked up to Hannibal, panicked, “You could lose your licence.”

“I've spoken to my lawyers. As I am not your official psychiatrist, I am in no legal trouble. However, I have decided to take time off either way until this cools down. I have been advised not to talk to anyone about this.”

“Fuck...” Will shook his head, “Fuck, I can't go into work...”

“Will. This case is far more important than whatever scandal people make of us. It will only get worse if you hide from it.”

“Jack is going to kill us. You understand, right?” He shut the laptop, stress gripping his shoulders.

Will came into the morgue. He felt every eye on him, spare those of the dead. The hum of the air conditioning made the silence even louder.

“Jack's been looking for you.” Beverly noted after a moment.

“I'm sure.” He shifted, stepping closer to the nurse's cadaver, “Can you blame me for avoiding him?”

She let out a little laugh, and Will felt anxiety trickle out of him, “Not at all.”

“Lecter, really?” Brian Zeller raised an eyebrow, shrugging at the disapproving look he got from the others, “I mean someone had to say something.”

“No, no one did.” Price sighed and pulled out another tray.

Zeller held up an evidence bag, “PT officer got a dipstick lobotomy.”

“It wasn't technically a lobotomy.” Katz corrected, “He didn't remove the brains, just scrambled them.”

“Why remove all the other organs completely intact, but then just scramble the brains?” Zeller set out an evidence bag of grey matter.

“It's what they did to him.” Will noted, feeling much better to be working the case and not worrying about his own life, not noticing the forensics team tensing as he spoke, “Dr. Chilton and every other Ph.D. candidate who attempted any type of therapy on him. Poked and prodded. Gave him tests. Told him who he was and who he wasn't.”

Will flinched when Jack spoke, standing behind him, “I want a list of every doctor, every therapist, anyone in any kind of psychiatry who ever had a conversation with Abel Gideon. And Will? My office, now.”

Will moved there quickly, then found himself waiting. He hoped Alana Bloom would be okay. She worked with Gideon extensively. He focused on those thoughts, trying not to worry about what was coming.

The door slammed, Jack's voice boomed, “Do I seem like an idiot, Graham?”

“No, sir.”

“Then why did you make me look like one? I put you under Dr. Lecter’s care. That was my call. The article mentions you as my employee. Mentions your mental health records. You realize how this looks for the whole department?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Don't give me that bullshit, Will!” He slammed his hands on the desk, “You're a good agent and I need you on this case too much! Can I trust you to be working at all?”

“I'm on medication I'm-”

“I'm not talking about your state of mind. I'm talking about you making the department look like fools because apparently, you of all people can't keep it in your pants! Now here's what's going to happen. Lecter is going to refer you to Bloom, who I hope to god I can trust. You're going to get back to work right now, and I'm not going to see another goddamn word about you on Tattlecrime, are we clear?”

“Yes sir!”

“Good. Now get out of my sight.”

Will scrambled away quickly, feeling lucky for getting off so easily. He felt eyes on him as he moved through the hallways. He didn't care too much. It's just one more thing about him people would gossip about. He still had his job, and his sanity.

Jack had him waiting in the car like a damn child. He cited the fever Will knew he still had, but it was clear, Jack was embarrassed of him. Will was fine when he was carving away at his mental health, getting into the heads of killers. But god forbid he be with a man, who happened to be his therapist. Will knew how ridiculous he sounded. He sighed and pressed his sweating forehead to the window, looking out.

The black stag stood perfectly in the woods, then paced away.

Will knew it wasn't real. It wasn't real. It wasn't real.

He found himself opening up the car door and following it out slowly, checking behind his back to be sure no one saw him. He followed him through the woods, pulling out his gun. He could taste blood in his mouth. He didn't know if it was his or the Rippers. He stopped, seeing a car. And seeing Abel Gideon sitting inside. Will slid into the backseat without thinking.

Gideon looked up, “I was expecting the Chesapeake Ripper. Or are you him?”

“He isn't me or you. But I can't.... I don't know who he is. Get out of the car.” He cocked his gun, making sure his order backed by threat.

Gideon took the keys out and stepped out without a fight. Will saw his face shift for a moment, to that of Garret Jacob Hobbs. He pulled the gun up.

“Easy tiger. No need for deadly force. I must say, I'm very sorry.”

Will gave a curious look.

“I'm about to bump you and your man off the front page of Tattlecrime. Miss Lounds has had quite the eventful evening.” He looked at Will and continued, “I didn't kill her, don't look so excited now. She really is far too valuable to kill. Besides, the Ripper reads her site. Did you know that?”

Will slammed Gideon against the car and cuffed him.

“No Miranda rights? You're not very talkative tonight Mr. Graham. You're looking a little peaky as well. I may be crazy but I believe you're sick.”

Will looked around before holding his gun to the back of Gideon's neck, “What do you know about the Ripper?”

“He's a proud man. Didn't take well to my... Claims of being him. Say, aren't you supposed to be the profiler? The FBI better have me on salary for this.”

“Talk.” Will dug the gun in deeper.

“Lots of killings around you have had surgical trophies taken... I dare say your killer is closer to you than you think. But that's all I want to tell you, Mr. Graham. Fact of the matter is, I don't think you'll shoot me.”

Will didn't. Twenty minutes later he watched as Abel Gideon was pushed into the squad car, his words still echoing in Will's head.

Jakc stood beside him, “I feel I owe you somewhat of an apology.”

“Don't.” Will sighed, “It won't mean much. You're worried about the scrutiny. Worried it will end in you losing me as an asset.”

Jack stayed quiet for a moment, weighing what was true in what Will said, “You understand you're more than an asset to me, right?”

“Which is why you have me out here working with a fever and encephalitis.”

“And you still managed to catch Gideon.”

“Sounds like a great asset.”

“Will.” He sighed, “Miriam Lass died because I was reckless. I thought I was being careful with you. But between the disease and Dr. Lecter...”

“Everything with Hannibal and I was a relationship between two consenting adults. I don't understand why none of you get that.” Will felt the cold of the snow through his boots. It was nice.

“Because he's your therapist. And I'm not, so you can have this conversation with Dr. Bloom.”

Will looked at the squad car as it left, done talking about himself, “Gideon gave me a lead on the Ripper.”

“He knows who the Ripper is?”

Will's lips twitched up to hear the excitement in Jack's voice, the thrill of the chase, “No. But he knows enough to give me a connection.”

January

Chapter Notes

This is it then hope you all have enjoyed.

Will woke with a start at the knock at the door. He rubbed his face, seeing that the computer screen in front of him had good black. He wondered just how long he was asleep. He stretched and answered, happy to see Hannibal standing there, holding a bag.

“Alana said you were not feeling well. I presume you haven't had lunch yet.”

“It's lunchtime?” Will cracked his neck a little and looked out at the sky. It was clouded over. Snow would fall again soon. He worked through the night and slept through the morning.

Hannibal frowned, feeling his forehead, “Have you been losing time again? Are you taking your medication.”

“No and yes. Not losing time, just sleep. I... It's the Ripper.”

“Does he haunt your dreams, love?’ Hannibal moved to Will's kitchen. Will kept the back door open, allowing the dogs to run out, watching them go.

“No. My head feels finally clear.” He smiled, “I'm so close I can feel him on me like a second skin.”

Hannibal gave him a worried look, as he brought out ingredients, getting out a pot, “We should take a vacation together soon. I want to show you France.”

Will blinked, “Did you hear me? I can't take a vacation, Hannibal, I'm about to catch one of the most prolific serial killers of our time.”

Hannibal turned his head away. Will couldn't read him right. He felt Hannibal’s concern, but didn't understand why it was coming now.

“You're going to work yourself to death, Will. On inspiration given to you by a madman. I can't act like that's good for your health.”

Will paused, betrayal cutting through him as Hannibal cut through meat, “You don't think I can catch him.”

Hannibal sighed, “I don't think you will. And I don't think you should. I fear this road ends with me losing you in some way. Turn around. Travel with me. Find yourself outside the haze of blood.”

“I'm not more important than anyone else. And if I don't do this, more people are going to die.” Will glared, moving so Hannibal had to look at him, “This is my job. And I'm more than capable.”

Hannibal sighed, “Will, if anyone is going to catch the Chesapeake Ripper, I know it will be you. That's not my reservation.”

“Then what? Because you lost the privilege to make calls as my therapist when you decided to start fucking me!” Will growled. It was a low blow. He knew it. He regretted the words instantly, but made no attempt to take them back.

Hannibal turned towards him, knife still in hand. Will saw Hannibal gutting him like Abigail gutted Nick Boyle. He blinked away the image, scared by the anger in Hannibal’s eyes.

“If I stop *fucking* you, will you take my advice? I'm not asking you to stop this case as your former psychiatrist. I'm asking you as someone who wants to spend life with you by my side.”

Will wrapped his arms around himself, “So that's it? Let the Ripper go or I lose you?”

Hannibal sighed, setting his hands flat on the counter, “I couldn't ask that of you. I'm only asking that you consider letting this go before I lose you.”

Will shook his head, “I'm sorry Hannibal. I need this. I know it's selfish. I... I need to be the one to do it. He did the copy cat killings too. He's right there with me. How about this. After I get him, we can go to France. I'll take a month off, hell, I deserve it.”

Hannibal gave a sad smile, “That sounds wonderful, Will. Just swear to me you will be careful.”

“On my life.”

Four days later, Will was still struggling. He kept lecturing, kept working. Jack didn't give him any new cases, giving him space instead. Will wondered which of them the Ripper case was more important to. He couldn't tell.

He found himself pouring through archives of tattlecrime for any mention of the Ripper, thinking about how he would read them. It was long work. Freddie wrote extensively on him.

He rubbed his eyes, going over an article from 12 July. Zeller was quoted, poor guy. Freddie was still flying low enough under the radar then. He clicked the whole article, surprised to see it was one on him.

Brian Zeller, forensic toxicologist, has worked with the profiler extensively. He does not have insight into the methods, but has faith in their outcome.

[Graham] is a little strange, but he gets the job done, and better than a lot of other profilers. I hope he works with us more.” Zeller said, “He's good in the classroom, I'm sure, but I'm

telling you. This guy could get some of the greats. Like, if anyone could catch the Ripper, it would be him."

Will's head spun. Hannibal's words echoed in his ears. He knew what the Chesapeake Ripper, in all his pride, would do upon hearing that. Will should have been dead back when that was published. Back in July.

He could see through the Ripper's eyes now. Seeing that name and hating it. The fear of being caught mixed with hurt ego at the insinuation he could. He followed Will. Trailed him into a low dive bar, watching him float to a table, hardly himself, so caught in the haze of another killer.

That was what interested him, enough to risk being caught. Someone who could see the world as he saw it, assume his point of view. He sent the man a drink, friendly. Room for interpretation of more. He would see. He was in no rush, not with the profiler caught in the head of another. Not when the Ripper hadn't killed in a year and a half.

The man came over, half himself, half someone else. The stranger won, leaving the bar with him, flirtatious and altogether dangerous. The Ripper drove home in the other man's car, cautious enough to keep him from driving, not sure if he could in that state of mind.

The profiler returned when they were upstairs, confusion on his face. The Ripper considered killing him again, but found something else, something interesting. The man clung to him for a connection to the real world, for his sanity. The Ripper saw opportunity. To take the madness and scupt it how he liked. He let the profiler leave that night, unharmed, biding time until they met again.

Will gripped the table, vision tunneling for a moment before focusing again. Every piece fell into place after that. He saw so clearly. He closed out of the webpage and started writing.

Freddie Lounds poured herself tea, about ready to retire for the night. She nearly jumped, coming into her sitting room to find Will Graham in her chair. She pursed her lips, "You of all people should know breaking and entering is illegal."

"Are we going to talk about what is and isn't legal now?" She could hear the distaste in Will's voice. He didn't keep his hatred of her a secret.

"Improper relations between a psychiatrist and his patient falls on that list. Is this about the article?" She sat down, pulling the bag out of her tea.

"No. Not about the one you're thinking of." He shifted. She noticed he was holding two folders in one hand, a gun in the other.

Her hand moved slowly to her phone in her pocket.

"I'm not going to shoot you, Lounds. The gun is for later in the evening." He sighed, "Don't call anyone. Shut up and listen because I'm about to give you the best damn story of your life."

Freddie set her phone on the coffee table as a show of faith, sitting rapt, then narrowing her eyes, “Why? You hate me. You hate my work.”

He laughed a little. She wondered how stable he was. He leaned forward, “See, I need a favor. You have good recording devices, don't you.”

“Yes.”

“Of course. You're going to loan me one. One that can transmit back to you.”

“The FBI has just as good recording instruments, if not better. And you work for them.”

“Crawford wouldn't... Approve of my way going forward on this. And I have a lot to lose.” He gave a bitter laugh, “I'm going to regret it, but I'd rather do it my way than risk letting him get away. He doesn't have time to build a defense this way.”

She assessed him. It didn't seem like he was lying, or that he was any more I'll than normal. “What's this all about, before I give you anything.”

Will dropped the folders, “The Chesapeake Ripper. Those contain everything I have on him. It should be enough. The recording, well, that's just being thorough. What I've written could get holes poked in it.”

She picked up the folders hesitantly.

“Ones for Crawford, the other's for you. They've got the same information.” He still held the gun. His finger was off the trigger, to Freddie's relief, “I lied. I need two things from you.”

She stayed quiet, waiting for him to continue.

“Store whatever I record. If... I don't make it back out, give the recordings and the second folder to Jack. Do that and you can publish whatever you want, as long as it's true. You'll be the first one.”

Freddie Lounds, above many things, was good at listening. She stayed quiet, making sure Will didn't have anything else he felt the need to break the silence with. She nodded, “So if I have this right, you're going to interview the Chesapeake Ripper.”

“Yes.” Will gave a small nod. She pulled up one of the folders, stopping as Will moved forward, “Don't. After I've left. You'll have more questions. This is a pressing and personal matter. I'll need your recorder.”

She set the folder down and grabbed him it, “This will send all information back to my computer with a bit of a delay. It will also be stored on device.”

He took it, not thanking her, pushing the buttons to be sure it worked, then nodding. “And, uh, Freddie?”

“Will?”

“I don't doubt your willingness to risk my life for a good story, but if you're gonna call the cops, don't do it unless you're almost certain I'm dead. I don't want this interrupted.”

She nodded, both of them understanding the other perfectly. She could already imagine the coverage of Graham's funeral. A martyr.

“Good luck.”

“Thanks.” He said. It was evident his fate was already written.

Will drove to Hannibal’s office, where he asked to meet him. He couldn't do it in his home. Not where they had shared meals, shared secrets, shared each other. Hannibal probably thought Will was just-

No. Will merged the person in his mind. And the Ripper knew. He knew Will was hunting him and he was finally caught.

He entered without knocking, finding Hannibal at his desk, sketching. Will watched him. Horns sprouted from his head and forked as they reached up to heaven. *See?* Will saw at last, his true form. He pointed his gun. His finger off the trigger. An idle threat.

Hannibal didn't look up, “Are you feeling quite yourself tonight, my love?”

“Don't bullshit me and I won't bullshit you here. I respect you too much for that, Hannibal.” He moved closer, “I'm going to ask you a question. You're going to answer.”

“And then I will ask you a question.” He held up a hand, anticipating the protest, “I promise my answers are more important to you. You hold the gun but not the upper hand.”

“Fine.” Will stared as Hannibal rose from his seat, “Are you the Chesapeake Ripper?”

“Not fond of the name. I am responsible for the murders ascribed to the Chesapeake Ripper. And the Copy Cat Killer, but I'm sure you know that. How did you find out? What let you know?”

“The article Louds wrote on me back in July. It was the final piece. It's the reason you slept with me, isn't it? To percieve the threat?”

Hannibal shook his head, “I slept with you because you interested me, and you came on to me very heavily. Or at least, the killer who's mind you were in did. I planned on killing you that night.”

“I thought about killing you that night too.” Will admitted.

“I know. It showed in your eyes. It's part of the reason I spared you.” He regarded Will, “Are you recording our conversation?”

“Yes.” Will said. No point in lying about it. No point in giving more details. “Why didn't you let me die of encephalitis?”

“In all honesty, I grew too fond of you. And when Jack had you hunting me, it was thrilling. I considered for a long time letting it develop and framing you for the Copy Cat killings. It would be easy, with you slipping so beautifully into madness.” Hannibal smelled the air, “Did you honestly come here alone? You swore on your life you would be careful. You're not being very careful at all.”

“Alone, but with collateral. You won't get away free if I go missing. That's enough. I... Wanted to be wrong about you.” He hid his heartbreak as best he could, then looked around the office, last little part of this all not yet answered, “The Ripper... You kept surgical trophies. I've been in every room of your house and have never seen them. Where are they?”

“You haven't been in my basement, my dear boy. And they're not surgical trophies.”

Will frowned, thinking. It dawned on him slowly. The Ripper was proud. There were two things Hannibal took great pride in, his appearance and his cooking. Will’s thoughts jumped to Hannibal, preparing food and talking about a butcher Will never saw him go to. Oh god. Will's mouth fell open, “Oh you're fucking kidding me.”

Hannibal tutted, “I'd appreciate you watching your language.”

“You... Oh my god. What the hell, Hannibal?!”

“Nothing brought me more pleasure than watching you dine on the flesh of those who's death you fought hard to bring justice too.”

Will gagged, thinking of all the meals he had that Hannibal cooked. He was sure Freddie, who he didn't doubt was listening, was grateful to be vegetarian. Will put his hand over his mouth, “The first meal you brought me?”

“From the body of Elise Nichols, who I killed just for you. You've asked three questions now, love. It's my turn.” Hannibal thought for a long moment, “How did it feel? To be inside my head? It's all I've wanted from you.”

Will considered it for a long moment before whispering, “I felt like God.”

“My own psychiatrist would agree with you. Narcissist personality disorder. May be why I wanted to see myself in you so much.” He moved closer, right hand concealing a foreign object. Will stepped back as he did. Hannibal didn't stop his advance, “You should have let this go, Will. We could be in France right now, sipping mimosas. You still would enjoy my cooking. I would hold you under the stars. I told you, my love, this road ends with me losing you.”

Will cocked the gun, staring Hannibal down, cool and controlled, “It's my turn, Hannibal.”

“Ask away.”

Will swallowed. He had enough now that no jury would let Hannibal go free. It wasn't about confessions anymore. He had the evidence he needed. But he needed more. He looked up at

Hannibal, saying in a softer voice, “Did you ever really love me or was this all part of your plan?”

Hannibal looked wounded, “Will, I truly loved you before, as I do now.”

Will blossomed open, his blood and intestines escaping his body as Hannibal slid the linoleum knife across his stomach. The half second Will dropped his guard had been enough.

Hannibal lowered his body slowly, kissing him gently as he was set down. He curled his fingers in Will's hair, “I mean this, I do love you. No, no, don't struggle now...”

Will struggled to catch his breath, hand moving down, fumbling at the large gash in an attempt of some sort to hold his guts in. Hannibal moved his hand away, intimately close to his body.

“Don't fight this, my dear boy. You've got such heart... I think I'll cut it out and eat it.” He gave a smile, amused at the poetry of the thought.

Will struggled to catch his breath, hand moving down, fumbling at the large gash. He felt Hannibal’s lips on his again. He saw the blue and red lights of cop cars. He smiled, reaching for Hannibal as he faded out of consciousness. Hannibal smiled back softly, looking at Will for a long moment before disappearing from his sight.

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